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ABSTRACT

Although the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) has been administered to Chinese test takers in Taiwan and Hong Kong for more than 22 years, and in China for the past decade, there is very little documentation on the history, test taker volumes, performance, and law school admission rates of these candidates. This study reviewed the history of LSAT administration in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, identified the numbers of Chinese test takers in these regions, and compared the performance of Chinese test takers from the three regions since 1991. The numbers of Chinese test takers in the People's Republic of China have increased the most sharply in the past 6 years, concurrent with the recent rapid economic and political developments in China. The average performance of test takers from the three regions was quite comparable. Female Chinese test takers tend to score slightly higher than their male counterparts. Those test takers whose dominant language is English perform substantially better than those whose dominant language is Chinese. (Author/SLD)

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History and Performance of Chinese Law School Admission Test Takers

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Executive Summary

Although Chinese test takers have long been international Law School Admission Test (LSAT) participants, there is very little documentation on the history, test taker volumes, performance, or law school admission rates of these candidates. The purpose of this study is to address the first three of these four issues: (1) to review the history of LSAT administrations in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong; (2) to delineate volumes of Chinese test takers in the three regions; and (3) to describe and compare the LSAT performance of Chinese test takers from the three regions since 1991.

Both archival information dating back to 1974 and more recent LSAT data since June 1991 concerning Chinese test takers were used in this study. The archival information was used to look into the history of LSAT administrations to Chinese test takers, while the latter data were used to assess and compare their LSAT performances.

On the basis of the available archival LSAT registration booklets, it was found that both Taiwan and Hong Kong have consistently hosted LSAT administrations since 1974, while it was not until December 1989 that the LSAT was first administered to three native Chinese in China. Between June 1986 and February 1991, a total of 14 test takers in China, 141 in Taiwan, and 128 in Hong Kong took the LSAT.

Between June 1991 and December 1995, the number of Chinese test takers in China increased from 3 in 1991, to 30 in 1995. Such a sharp rise in test taker volumes was concurrent with the recent fast economic and political developments in China. The test taker volume in Taiwan also grew — from 21 to 48. Meanwhile, the test taker volume in Hong Kong steadily declined from 26 in 1991, to 8 in 1995.

In June 1991, the LSAT adopted its new 120-180 scale. Based on data since then, the performance of international Chinese LSAT test takers was assessed and compared. Three major findings were discovered. First, the average performances of the Chinese LSAT test takers in the three regions are quite comparable, and also comparable to the average performance in the general LSAT population. Second, female Chinese test takers tended to score slightly higher than their male counterparts. Finally, and not surprisingly, those Chinese test takers whose dominant language is English performed substantially better than those whose dominant language is Chinese.

With the increasing number of contacts between the U.S. and China through political, cultural, technical, and trade exchanges, a future surge in the number of Chinese LSAT test takers may be realized due to China's need to acquire substantially more expertise in U.S. and international law. Already this year, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) has observed a new wave of inquiries from China concerning LSAT administrations. As of October 7, 1996, a total of 69 Chinese nationals have registered for the December 7, 1996 LSAT administration, the only administration in China this year. This number already represents twice the total 1995 test taker volume in China.

Abstract

Although the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) has been administered to Chinese test takers in Taiwan and Hong Kong for more than 22 years and in China for the past decade, there is very little documentation on the history, test taker volumes, performance, or law school admission rates of these candidates. The purpose of the current study is to address the first three of the four issues:

1. to review the history of LSAT administrations in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong;
2. to delineate volumes of Chinese test takers in the three regions; and
3. to describe and compare the LSAT performance of Chinese test takers from the three regions since 1991.

There are three major findings. First, the numbers of Chinese test takers in Peoples Republic of China have increased the most sharply for the past six years, concurrent with the recent fast economic and political developments in China. Second, the average LSAT performance of the Chinese test takers in the three regions is quite comparable. Third, female Chinese test takers tend to score slightly higher than their male counterparts. Finally, those Chinese test takers whose dominant language is English perform substantially better than those whose dominant language is Chinese.

Introduction

The main objective of the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is to measure the proficiency in reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and analytical reasoning — essential skills for the success of law school studies (LSAC, 1996). Established in 1947, the LSAT is administered four times a year to about 130,000 test takers in approximately 151 countries and regions worldwide. Although over 99% of LSAT test takers come from the United States and Canada, international test taker volume is on the rise. For example, since June 1991 the total number of foreign test takers range from 420 to 694 (See Table 1). With increasing international participation, it is of interest to study the performance trends of foreign LSAT test takers. As a first step in this direction, the current study reviews the history and performance of Chinese LSAT test takers from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

Table 1:
Total numbers of foreign LSAT test takers between June 1991 and December 1995

LSAT Administrations	Total LSAT Population	Foreign LSAT Test Taker	Percentage of Foreign Test
June, October, December, 1991	117,874	420	0.356%
February, June, October, December, 1992	140,398	694	0.494%
February, June, October, December, 1993	135,451	532	0.393%
February, June, October, December, 1994	128,034	493	0.385%
February, June, October, December, 1995	119,030	567	0.476%

The purpose of this study is three-fold: (1) to obtain an overview of the history of LSAT administration to Chinese test takers in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong; (2) to summarize the performance trends of Chinese test takers in comparison to the performance trends of the LSAT test taker population; and (3) to determine the effects of factors such as gender and English proficiency on test performance. It is hoped that a better understanding of the performance of Chinese LSAT test takers will be achieved through this study.

Research Data and Method

This study is exploratory and descriptive. Its intent is to provide a better understanding of the history of LSAT administration to Chinese test takers, and to assess Chinese test taker performance. Both archival information and modern LSAT data concerning Chinese test takers have been gathered. Unfortunately, in spite of nearly 50 years of LSAT administration history, the earliest available LSAT registration information traces back only to 1974. Also the scale of the LSAT test score changed in June, 1991, from a 10-48 point scale to its current 120-180 point scale. To simplify this report, all the statistical analyses used data since June, 1991 when the new 120-180 LSAT scale was instituted. Interviews with the staff of Law School Admission Council familiar with the history and procedures of LSAT administration in these China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong provide much of the qualitative information summarized in this study.

Results

Historical Perspective

Although the exact dates when the first LSAT administrations occurred in Taiwan and Hong Kong are unavailable, archival LSAT registration booklets indicate that these two regions have consistently hosted LSAT administrations, at least, since 1974. Inside China, the first LSAT seemed to have been administered in October, 1988, not to Chinese nationals but to some foreign employees working in China at that time. However, it was not until December, 1989 when the LSAT was first administered to three native Chinese test takers. Table 2 summarizes the total number of test takers, including both Chinese and non-Chinese, who took the LSAT inside China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong between June 1986 and February, 1991. Clearly both Taiwan and Hong Kong hosted substantial numbers of LSAT test takers (141 and 128, respectively), while the number of LSAT test takers in China was very small (only 13).

Table 2:
Total numbers of LSAT test takers from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, June 1986–February, 1991

Regions	China	Taiwan	Hong Kong	Total
Test Taker numbers	13	141	128	282

Note. The numbers in Table 2 include both Chinese and non-Chinese test takers because the key variable to distinguish them is not available.

Trends of LSAT Administrations and Performance of Chinese Test Takers since June, 1991

Table 3 summarizes the numbers and mean performance of the Chinese test takers in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong as well as the overall mean scores of the total LSAT test taker population between June 1991 and December 1995. Three trends can be seen. First, in comparison to the 282 Chinese LSAT test takers between February 1988 and February 1991, there was a substantial increase of Chinese LSAT test takers between June 1991 and December 1995— a total of 334.

The second trend indicates that the number of Chinese test takers from China increased steadily from 3 to 30 between June, 1991 and December, 1995. This general upward trend concurred with the open-door policy, economic reforms, and fast-growing economy of China during this period. Still with the largest Chinese test taker volume of 178, it is interesting to note that Taiwan followed an up-and-down cycle every two years. For some unknown reason, the numbers of the Chinese test takers in Hong Kong steadily declined over this period, from 26 to only 8 test takers.

The third trend notes that, on the average, Chinese test takers from the three regions performed only slightly below the average score of the LSAT test taker population. Mean LSAT scores of Chinese test takers centered around 148, only two points below the overall LSAT population mean. The mean scores of Chinese test takers from the three regions only differed slightly.

Table 3:

Performance trends of Chinese Test Takers who took the LSAT in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong since February, 1991

	China		Taiwan		Hong Kong		All		LSAT Population
Testing Year	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	Mean
1991	3	149.7	21	146.6	26	149.7	50	148.4	150.2
1992	6	151.7	37	148.3	27	147.2	70	148.2	150.2
1993	7	154.6	27	145.4	16	147.1	50	147.3	150.3
1994	21	147.3	48	147.5	12	154.1	81	148.4	149.5
1995	30	150.2	45	144.8	8	151.0	83	147.4	149.7
All	67	149.9	178	146.6	89	149.2	334	147.9	150.0

Performance Trends of Male and Female Chinese Test Takers

Table 4 summarizes the mean scores of male and female test takers from the three regions as well as the mean scores of the male and female LSAT population. Except for three years for Hong Kong test takers, female Chinese LSAT test takers, in general, performed slightly better than their male counterparts. This is opposite to the scenario of the LSAT population — the mean scores of the female LSAT population are slightly lower than those of their male counterparts.

Table 4:

Performance trends of male and female Chinese test takers

	China				Taiwan				Hong Kong				LSAT Population	
Testing Year	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female		Male	Female
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	Mean
1991	148.0	3	N/A	N/A	144.3	7	147.8	14	149.3	18	150.4	8	150.7	149.5
1992	148.7	3	154.7	3	147.8	18	148.7	19	148.0	13	146.5	14	150.7	149.6
1993	152.0	2	155.6	5	138.7	12	150.9	15	151.6	7	143.7	9	151.3	149.8
1994	145.9	17	153.3	4	144.9	28	151.1	20	152.0	8	158.3	4	150.0	148.8
1995	149.2	17	151.6	13	143.4	22	146.2	23	150.5	6	152.5	2	150.3	149.0
All	147.9	41	153.0	25	144.2	87	148.8	91	149.8	52	148.2	37	150.6	149.3

Effects of English Proficiency on LSAT Performance

Table 5 summarizes the mean scores of the Chinese test takers whose dominant language is English in comparison with those whose dominant language is Chinese. Note that the Chinese test takers whose dominant language is English are not necessarily foreign nationals. They might have grown up in families where one parent might be English speaking, while the other, Chinese speaking. Or they might have been educated in schools where English is used as the only instructional language.

Table 5:
Performance trends of the test takers whose dominant language is or is not English

Testing Year	China				Taiwan				Hong Kong				LSAT Population	
	English		Chinese		English		Chinese		English		Chinese		English	Other
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	Mean
1991	.	.	.	.	155.3	4	140.9	10	154.3	6	149.3	19	150.2	143.9
1992	.	.	150.4	5	156.5	13	143.6	23	150.9	8	145.7	19	150.2	143.1
1993	158.4	5	145.0	2	159.9	7	142.2	18	145.5	6	148.3	9	150.3	143.2
1994	.	.	147.3	21	154.7	18	143.9	29	157.5	2	153.0	7	149.5	142.8
1995	.	.	.	.	.	.	143.0	3	155.5	2	.	.	149.7	142.9
All	158.4	5	147.7	28	156.2	42	143.0	83	151.3	24	148.4	54	150.0	143.2

Note. The "." stands for the combination of missing and nonapplicable cases.

As expected, the Chinese test takers with English as their dominant language (with a mean score of 154.21) performed substantially higher than did those whose dominant language is Chinese (with a mean score 145.63). The former group even performed above the LSAT population means. On the other hand, those Chinese test takers whose dominant language is not English scored substantially below LSAT population means, although their performance was slightly higher to that of all other non–English–speaking foreign test takers.

Conclusions

This study provides an overall picture of the history and performance trends of Chinese LSAT test takers from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. With regard to the history of LSAT administration, both Taiwan and Hong Kong have hosted the LSAT for more than 22 years, while the LSAT has been a fairly new international test inside China. In terms of test taker volumes over the past five years, China has had the fastest growing increase, Taiwan has maintained its momentum, while Hong Kong demonstrates a gradually shrinking volume. The average LSAT performance of the Chinese test takers in the three regions is quite comparable. On average, Chinese LSAT test takers have performed close to LSAT population means. The average scores of female test takers seem to be slightly higher than those of male test takers for both China and Taiwan. As expected, the test takers fluent in English scored higher than those less fluent in English.

This study is not without shortcomings. First, the total number of Chinese test takers is fairly small, especially when their performance is investigated at more detailed levels, such as according to five year, three regions, or two genders. Therefore, the above results should be interpreted with caution due to their potential instability caused by small sample sizes. Second, no explanations can be offered for some of the

findings, such as the continually decreasing test taker volumes in Hong Kong. In spite of the shortcomings, this paper does offer a comprehensive overview of LSAT administration to and performance of Chinese test takers.

Two future studies can be considered. The first one would follow up on existing Chinese LSAT test takers to see how successful they have been in applying to and completing law schools, and what careers they are pursuing now. A second study would survey upcoming new Chinese LSAT test takers about their academic and professional background and future career goals. These two studies could provide a wide spectrum of valuable information on how successful Chinese applicants are in American law schools and what contributions they can make to their home countries.

For the past 15 years, China has become a country with the largest foreign graduate student body in the U.S., majoring mostly in sciences. With its fast increasing contacts with the U.S. through political, cultural, technical, and trade exchanges, it is understandable that China will acquire a large number of Chinese expertise who specialize in U.S. laws. It can be predicted that the next five years will witness a new wave of Chinese students coming to the U.S. to study U.S. and international laws. (Legal studies have already been the most fashionable field inside China for the past five years.) As a matter of fact, this year the LSAC has observed a sudden surge of inquiries from China about the LSAT tests through postal mail, fax, and more recently, electronic mail networks. For example, for the December 7 1996 LSAT administration, the only LSAT administration in China in the 1996 testing year, the total number of registered test takers has jumped to 69, twice as many as 1995, and the number is still growing. No doubt, there is a fast-growing potential for LSAT administrations in China.

Author Notes

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